

Emergency funding keeps Loaves and Fishes open

Food Banks

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WATSONVILLE — You know the economy is in a slump when groups providing services to the homeless and hungry need a safety net themselves.

Loaves and Fishes, the Watsonville-based food pantry, will keep its doors open, thanks to \$3,500 in one-time emergency funds from the Watsonville City Council.

“Ninety percent of our funding comes from donations, and those are down by 50 percent this year,” said Jose Torres, president of the Loaves and Fishes board.

Torres said they are serving 56 percent more people. Even with a solid year of support, keeping pace with the increase in need is difficult.

“We keep a lot of refrigerated food on hand, and we cook every day — that means a PG&E bill of about \$700

a month,” said Torres.

Established after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake left thousands of Watsonville residents homeless and in need of food and clothing, Loaves and Fishes has become the final safety net for many in the Pajaro Valley. They have served more than 14,000 hot meals this year and distributed more than 9,000 food bags. Loaves and Fishes is the only homeless program that provides a hot noon lunch in the Watsonville area.

As with most community organizations, the money supporting the year-round services comes in during holiday fund-raising campaigns. The \$3,500 from Watsonville will help bridge the gap between now and the kickoff of this year’s campaign. Loaves and Fishes is working with the City Council to develop a financial recovery plan.

“We wanted to ensure that this one-time allocation was going to



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Loaves and Fishes will be able to continue doing its good work thanks to an emergency \$3,500 grant from the city of Watsonville.

make a difference, that the program can sustain itself,” said Watsonville City Councilman Rafael Lopez

whose district is home to Loaves and Fishes.

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Part of that plan is to generate income by converting a portion of its Second Street home base into affordable housing units that can be rented.

“I’m very happy about granting the money — I think they do good work. With state cuts and social services cuts there are a lot of people with a very basic need for food,” said Lopez.

That need was echoed by Annette Marcum, director of the Valley Churches United Missions, a food agency that serves San Lorenzo and Scotts Valley.

“I like to think agencies like ours and Loaves and Fishes are the temperature takers in the community. We’ve seen a 100 percent increase in clientele. White collars, people that used to donate, are now coming in for food,” said Marcum.

“We’ve seen a 20 percent increase in need throughout our network, an additional 8,000 people to feed” said Second Harvest executive director Willy Elliott-McCrea.

Second Harvest Food Bank distributes food to 120 programs and agencies in Santa Cruz and San Bernardino counties, including Loaves and Fishes.

“It’s a tough year for families, for communities and for budgets,” said Elliot-McCrea.